

**State Board of Education  
December 15, 2009  
Item I**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Montpelier, Vermont**

**TEAM:** Commissioner's Office

**ITEM:** Will the State Board vote to regroup the supervisory union/district structure of which the Essex Town Supervisory District is a part?

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: That the State Board vote to not regroup the Essex Town Supervisory District at this time. The Essex Town Supervisory District Board may proceed with its process to hire a new permanent superintendent.**

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** 16 V.S.A. §§ 241(a) and 261(a), Rule 3232.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** Following notification by the Essex Town SSD Board of an impending vacancy in its superintendency, the State Board of Education, at its November 17, 2009 meeting, authorized the Commissioner to study the advisability of re-grouping the supervisory union/district structure of which the Essex Town Supervisory District is a part (Rule 3232 of the Vermont State Board of Education Manual of Rules and Practices). The study report is attached.

**COST IMPLICATIONS:** See attached study report.

**STAFF AVAILABLE:** Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner; Mark Oettinger, General Counsel; Bill Talbott, CFO; Brad James, Education Finance Manager; Vaughn Altemus, Education Finance Manager

**Report of the Study**  
**on**  
**Regrouping the Essex Town Supervisory District**

**Presented to the Vermont State Board of Education**  
**December 15, 2009**



## **Introduction**

Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 261(a) the State Board of Education may under its own initiative “regroup the supervisory unions of the state or create new supervisory unions in such manner as to afford increased efficiency or greater convenience and economy and to facilitate K-12 curriculum planning and coordination as changed conditions may seem to require.”

At its November 17, 2009 meeting the State Board of Education adopted a motion directing the Department of Education to study at its own expense whether the Essex Town Supervisory District (ETSD) ought to be grouped with the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union (CCSU) and no longer have a dedicated superintendent and associated staffing. The superintendent of ETSD will be retiring at the end of this school year, prompting the Board and commissioner to study this configuration. This is not a unification question. The K–8 ETSD would remain the same and continue to be overseen by its board of directors. (Map 1 shows these districts in Chittenden County.)

## **Scope of Study**

This study begins by describing the current configuration of the ETSD and the CCSU. It then compares administrative staffing and costs of these two entities with other supervisory unions and districts of similar size using data submitted to the department by the supervisory unions and districts. The study also reviews the enrollment trends of the schools within the two entities over the past eight years, as well as a comparison of two years of 11<sup>th</sup> grade NECAP data.

## **Background**

“Supervisory Union” means an administrative, planning and educational service unit created by the State Board under section 261 of this title, which consists of two or more school districts; if the context clearly allows, the term may also include a supervisory district. (16 V.S.A. § 11(23)). There are 46 supervisory unions serving an average of six districts.

“Supervisory district” means a supervisory union which consists of only one school district, which may be a unified union district. (16 V SA § 11(24)). There are 12 supervisory districts.

### **Essex Town Supervisory District**

Students in grades K–8 residing in Essex Town are members of the Essex Town Supervisory District. This is the only K–8 supervisory district in the state. If a school district is large enough, 16 V.S.A. § 261(c) permits the State Board to designate as a supervisory district any district that offers schools in grades K–12, including a unified union.

After the Essex Union High School District #46 was created, the ETSD was no longer a K–12 district, but a K–8 school district. In 2006 Act 115 permitted any district that offered grades K–8 and was designated a supervisory district before January 1, 2006 to remain a supervisory district. To date ETSD is the only district that has met these criteria. (Map 2 shows ETSD.)

### **Chittenden Central Supervisory Union**

The Chittenden Central Supervisory Union is composed of three school districts: Westford Town School District (grades K–12), Essex Junction School District Incorporated (grades K–8), and Essex Union High School District #46 (grades 9–12). Incorporated school districts are created under Subchapter 2 of Chapter 9 of 16 V.S.A.

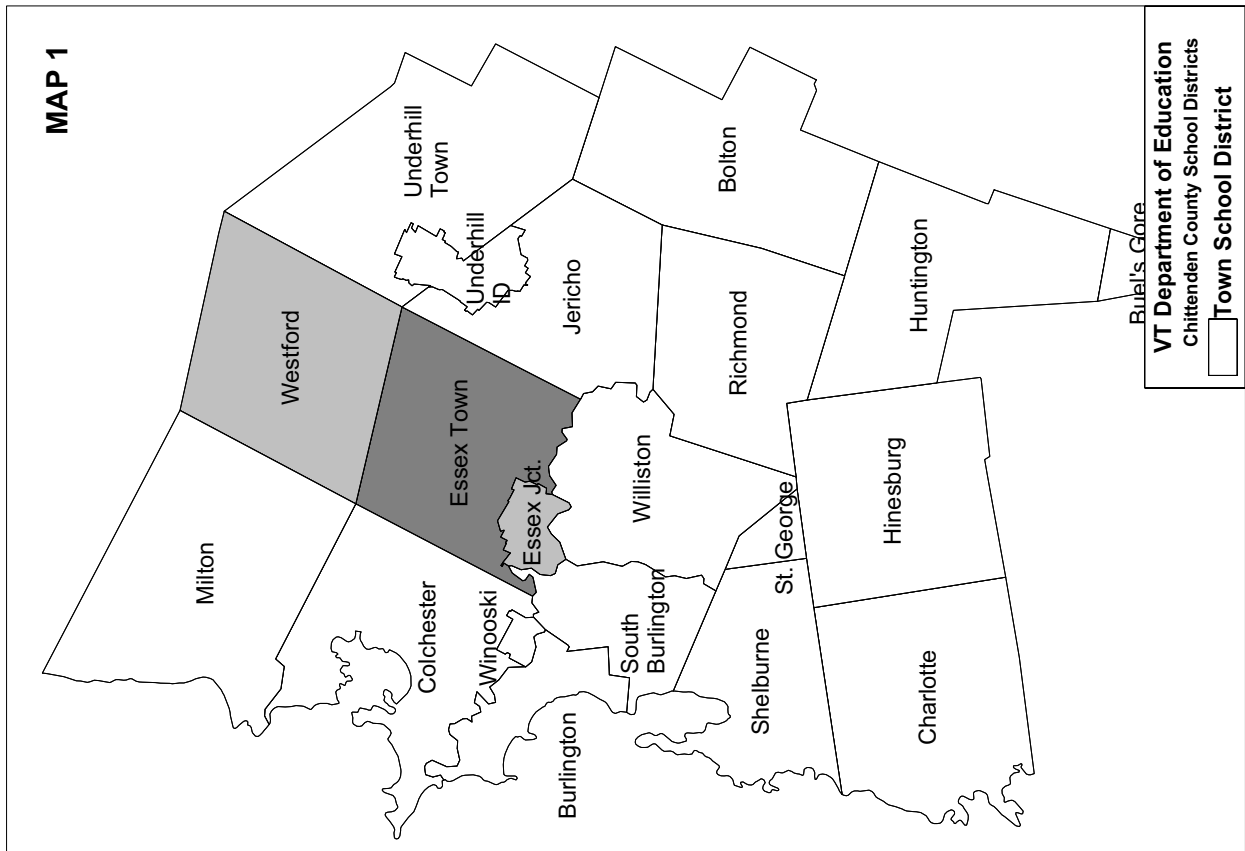
Students residing in Essex Junction in grades K–8 are members of the Essex Junction School District Incorporated. This district operates four schools: Hiawatha and Summit Street Schools (PK–3), Thomas Fleming School (grades 4 and 5), and Albert D. Lawton School (grades 6–8).

Essex Junction is one of 10 incorporated school districts. One of the attributes of incorporated districts is that they are granted charters by the General Assembly permitting them to operate in specified ways at variance to the general provisions of Title 16. By its charter the Essex Junction School District Incorporated is also authorized to operate and maintain a recreation program. (16 V.S.A. App. § 11-3.1.19)

Students in grades K–12 residing in the Town of Westford are members of the Westford Town School District. This district provides for the education of students in grades K–8 by operating the Westford Elementary School, and provides for the education of its 9–12<sup>th</sup> grade students by paying tuition to other public schools, or by paying the average announced union school tuition to approved independent schools with parents paying the balance. In either case the parents choose the school.

Students in grades 9–12 residing in Essex Junction and Essex Town are members of the Essex Union High School District #46. This district provides for the education of these students by operating the Essex Union High School. Essex Union High School District #46 is also host to the Center for Technology Regional Technical Center. (Map 3 shows the Essex Union High School District. Map 4 shows CCSU.)

This technical center and the Burlington Technical Center provide career and technical education programs for students in grades 9–12 throughout the Chittenden County Service Region, as provided by State Board of Education Rule 2374.1.B.





## Data

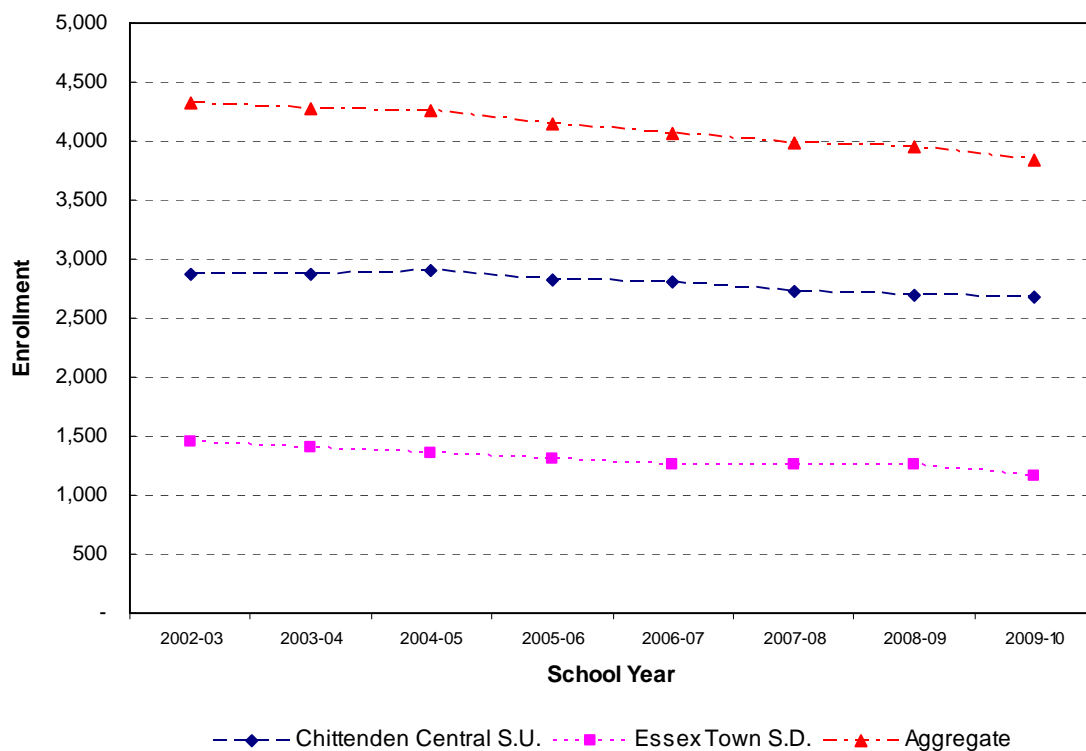
Data used for staffing and salaries are from the FY2009 Teacher/Staff Report and were extracted from the Education Data Warehouse (EDW). Enrollments are also from the EDW with the exception of the fall 2009 data which came from the current Student Census.

Staff categories were based on information from the two supervisory entities and were narrowed down to those easily identified as being at the central administrative office from EDW data. These categories were also used for the comparative supervisory unions.

## Enrollment Trends

Student enrollments in both the ETSD and the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union have been in decline for the past eight years (Graph 1).

**Graph 1: Enrollment Trends, FY2003 - 2010**



Over this time period, CCSU has seen a decline of -6.8% in its overall enrollment while ETSD has had an enrollment decline of -19.9% (Table 1).

**Table 1: Enrollments, FY2003 – FY2010**

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	overall
Chittenden Central S.U.	2,877	2,872	2,898	2,826	2,803	2,725	2,694	2,682	
percent change	NA	-0.17%	0.91%	-2.48%	-0.81%	-2.78%	-1.14%	-0.45%	-6.8%
Essex Town S.D.	1,448	1,403	1,359	1,313	1,263	1,251	1,255	1,160	
percent change	NA	-3.11%	-3.14%	-3.38%	-3.81%	-0.95%	0.32%	-7.57%	-19.9%
Aggregate	<b>4,325</b>	<b>4,275</b>	<b>4,257</b>	<b>4,139</b>	<b>4,066</b>	<b>3,976</b>	<b>3,949</b>	<b>3,842</b>	
percent change	NA	-1.16%	-0.42%	-2.77%	-1.76%	-2.21%	-0.68%	-2.71%	11.2%

### The Consolidated Supervisory Union and Comparable Supervisory Unions

Five supervisory unions were chosen for comparative purposes, based on similar sized fall 2009 enrollments (Table 2).

**Table 2: Comparative Supervisory Unions**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
		Number of Districts	# School Budgets	Enrollment FY10	Staff FTEs FY09	Staff per SD	Staff per School Board / Budget	FY10 Enrollment per FY09 Staff
Chittenden Central S.U.	SU013	3	5	2,682	19.8	6.6	3.3	135.5
Essex Town S.D.	SU059	1	1	1,160	7.8	7.8	2.6	148.7
<b>Consolidated</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3,842</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>139.2</b>
Southwest VT S.U.	SU005	7	6	3,407	19.0	2.7	2.1	179.3
Chittenden East S.U.	SU012	8	7	2,928	8.3	1.0	0.9	351.5
Chittenden South S.U.	SU014	6	6	4,442	21.9	3.6	4.4	203.1
Franklin Central S.U.	SU023	4	4	2,984	14.0	3.5	3.5	213.1
Windham Southeast S.U.	SU048	6	6	3,085	18.6	3.1	2.1	165.9

The consolidation of ETSD and CCSU would have the second largest enrollment (column 5) when compared to the five other supervisory unions, with only Chittenden South Supervisory Union being larger (4,442 versus 3,842). However, unless staffing positions were also consolidated between the two supervisory entities, the combination of the two supervisory entities would have the greatest number of staff Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) (column 6: 27.6 FTE's versus 21.9 at Chittenden South Supervisory Union, the second highest FTE count).



Additionally, a joining of the two supervisory entities would have a total of four school districts (column 3). Of the comparable supervisory unions, one has four school districts, two have six, one has seven, and the last has eight, all with a significantly lower number of FTEs in the central administrative offices. The consolidated entity would have five school budgets (column 4) plus the recreation budget. However, four of the five comparable supervisory unions have six or more school budgets, all with fewer central administrative staff FTEs.

### **Potential Savings in Personnel Costs**

In FY2009, the CCSU employed 19.8 FTEs with total salaries and benefits of \$1,787,000 (Table 2). The Essex Town School District had 7.8 FTEs in comparable positions with salaries and benefits totaling \$772,000. A consolidated entity would have 27.6 FTEs with a cost of \$2,559,000 if no positions were reduced. A joining of the two supervisory entities would allow for consolidation of a number of positions with subsequent personnel savings, as each entity has many of the same job categories. See chart on following page.

**Table 3: Staffing Categories, Levels, and Total Salaries and Benefits**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Salaries + Benefits FTEs Staffing category		Number of Districts	Enroll FY10	Curriculum Coordinators	EEE Directors	Special Education Directors	Voc Education and Adult Ed Directors	Superintendents	Assistant Superintendents	Admin. Assists., Clerical & Secretarial Support (2300)	Business Managers	Admin. Assists., Clerical & Secretarial Support	Totals
				305	306	309	311	401	402	403	601	602	
Chittenden Central S.U. FY2009 FTEs	SU013	3	2,682	109,022 1.00	- -	306,645 2.80	388,322 3.40	146,511 1.00	125,067 1.00	300,596 4.00	120,198 1.00	290,592 5.60	1,786,953 19.80
Essex Town S.D. FY2009 FTEs	SU059	1	1,160	131,965 1.00	- -	120,240 1.00	- -	163,289 1.00	- -	69,800 1.00	125,300 1.00	161,100 2.80	771,694 7.80
<b>Consolidated</b> Aggregated FY2009 FTEs		<b>4</b>	<b>3,842</b>	<b>240,987</b> 2.00	<b>-</b> -	<b>426,885</b> 3.80	<b>388,322</b> 3.40	<b>309,800</b> 2.00	<b>125,067</b> 1.00	<b>370,396</b> 5.00	<b>245,498</b> 2.00	<b>451,692</b> 8.40	<b>2,558,647</b> 27.60
Southwest Vermont S.U. FY2009 FTEs	SU005	7	3,407	- -	83,756 1.00	195,264 2.00	- -	124,574 1.00	109,333 1.00	101,978 2.00	111,815 1.00	534,205 11.00	1,260,925 19.00
Chittenden East S.U. FY2009 FTEs	SU012	8	2,928	- -	- -	189,958 2.00	- -	258,664 2.00	- -	214,269 3.33	102,149 1.00	- -	765,040 8.33
Chittenden South S.U. FY2009 FTEs	SU014	6	4,442	110,526 1.00	- -	510,643 4.87	- -	195,700 1.00	316,220 3.00	377,607 8.00	164,074 1.00	197,958 3.00	1,872,728 21.87
Franklin Central S.U. FY2009 FTEs	SU023	4	2,984	100,469 1.00	45,763 0.50	161,755 1.80	189,359 2.00	121,340 1.00	- -	70,974 2.00	85,683 1.00	233,115 4.70	1,008,458 14.00
Windham Southeast S.U. FY2009 FTEs	SU048	6	3,085	185,658 2.00	- -	197,908 2.00	293,685 3.00	128,636 1.00	- -	190,931 2.80	128,629 1.00	404,638 6.80	1,530,085 18.60

Based on both supervisory entities having the same job categories, an estimated savings of \$618,000 could be realized by consolidating six positions. The positions and savings are highlighted in Table 3 and shown below. (The average cost of a position was used for staff category 602, administrative support to the business office.)

One less superintendent - \$147,000  
One less superintendent administrative assistant - \$70,000  
One less business manager - \$120,000  
One less business office administrative assistant (602) - \$52,000  
One less curriculum coordinator - \$109,000  
One less special education director - \$120,000

The savings of \$618,000 amount to 24% of the total FY2009 salaries and benefits of the staff positions analyzed for the consolidated supervisory union. These projected savings would translate to reduced supervisory union assessments to the four member school districts. Put another way, the projected savings are approximately equivalent to a reduction of 1.6 cents on the equalized tax rates for each district, assuming supervisory union costs are assessed on equalized pupils.

### **Personnel Summary**

There is a potential for considerable savings in personnel costs if consolidation occurs due to overlapping positions between the two supervisory entities. Additionally, and even with the loss of six positions, the consolidated supervisory union would be on a par with Chittenden South in terms of central administrative staff, but would have fewer school districts and fewer students. We understand that some positions may still be required, such as an assistant special education director. The consolidated supervisory union would have more pupils and central administrative staff than the other comparable supervisory unions. In all but one case, it would also have fewer school districts, with the exception being an equal number of districts.

### **Additional Potential Sources of Savings**

Due both to time and personnel constraints, other areas of potential savings were not investigated. The following is a partial list of areas where savings could likely be found if a consolidation of the two supervisory entities was to occur. This is not a complete list, but is illustrative of potential areas for savings:

- Facility costs and maintenance
- Central offices
- Contracts
- Transportation
- Food services
- Purchasing agreements
- Copier costs
- Centralized services
- Software purchasing

### **Curriculum Alignment within a Supervisory Union**

The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), Vermont's state accountability assessment, is fully aligned with state standards and grade expectations. What this means is that every NECAP test item is designed specifically to measure one of the state's Grade Expectations, and each year all the Grade Expectations designated for state assessment are measured by at least one item. It therefore stands to reason that aligning local curriculum, instruction and classroom assessments with the Grade Expectations will have a significant positive impact on a school's annual test scores. Beyond testing, alignment provides schools with a comprehensive and coherent learning progression that helps assure that students acquire the knowledge and skills they will need to achieve in each successive school year.

Analysis of achievement gains in Vermont schools supports the value of alignment. For the past several years department staff members have contacted schools that posted the greatest improvements on test scores compared to the previous year's results. Although administrators attributed their students' success to a range of factors, all of them had undertaken a process to align local curriculum, instruction and assessment with the Vermont Grade Expectations. Many of them also used NECAP scores and curriculum mapping to identify Grade Expectations that were not covered fully or at all. All of these schools saw an increase of at least 20 percentage points, and the "most improved" school increased the percentage of proficient students by more than 30 points.

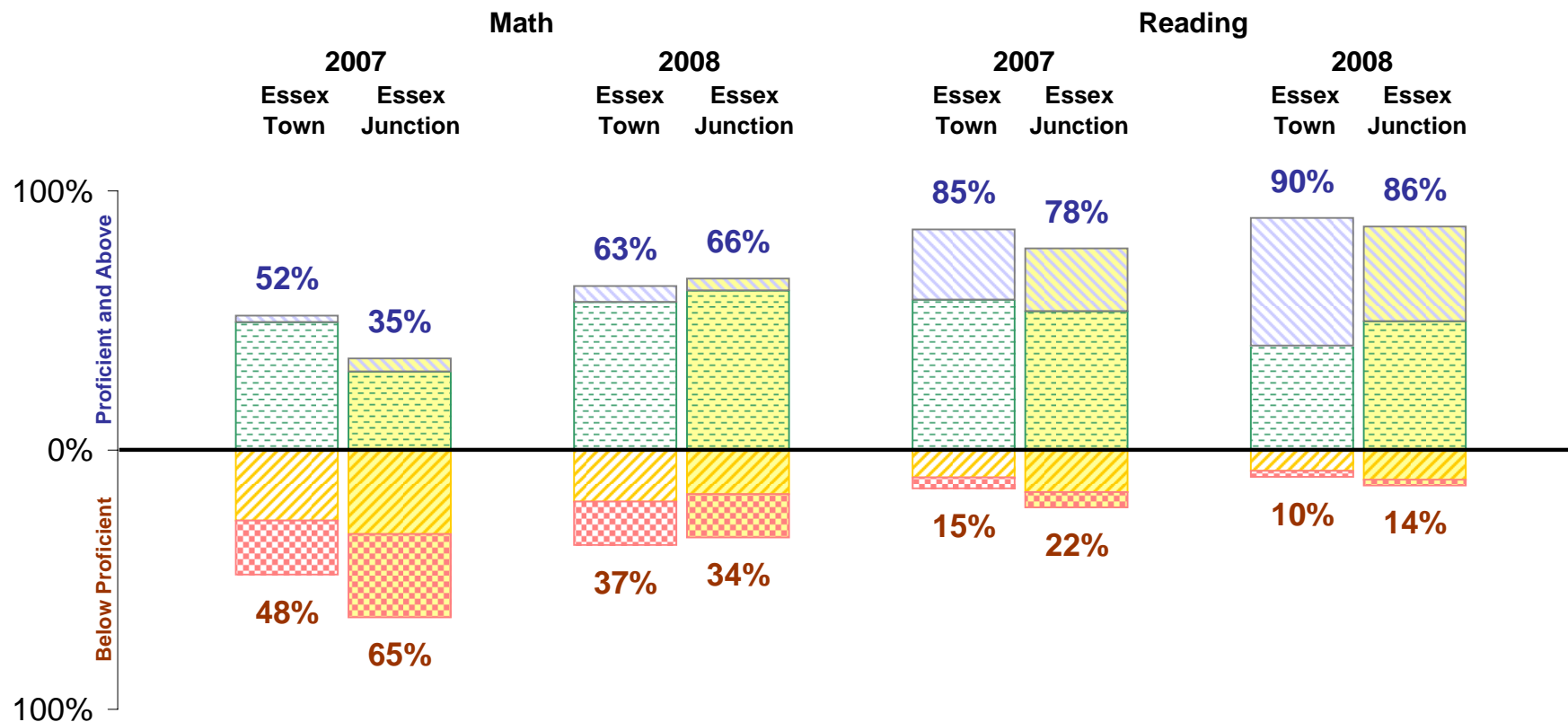
In comparison, only two schools in the Essex Town and Chittenden Central systems improved more than 10 percentage points (Hiawatha in reading and A.D. Lawton in math), and four schools experienced decreases in the percentage of proficient students for both reading and math (Essex Elementary, Fleming, Summit and Westford). It should be noted that these schools generally post achievement results that are at or above the state average. However, they are not showing significant gains.

### **Assessment Results**

Using 11<sup>th</sup> grade NECAP Math and Reading results, the following charts indicate the comparison between Essex town 11<sup>th</sup> graders and Essex Junction 11<sup>th</sup> graders on statewide assessments.

# Grade 11 NECAP Results Essex High School

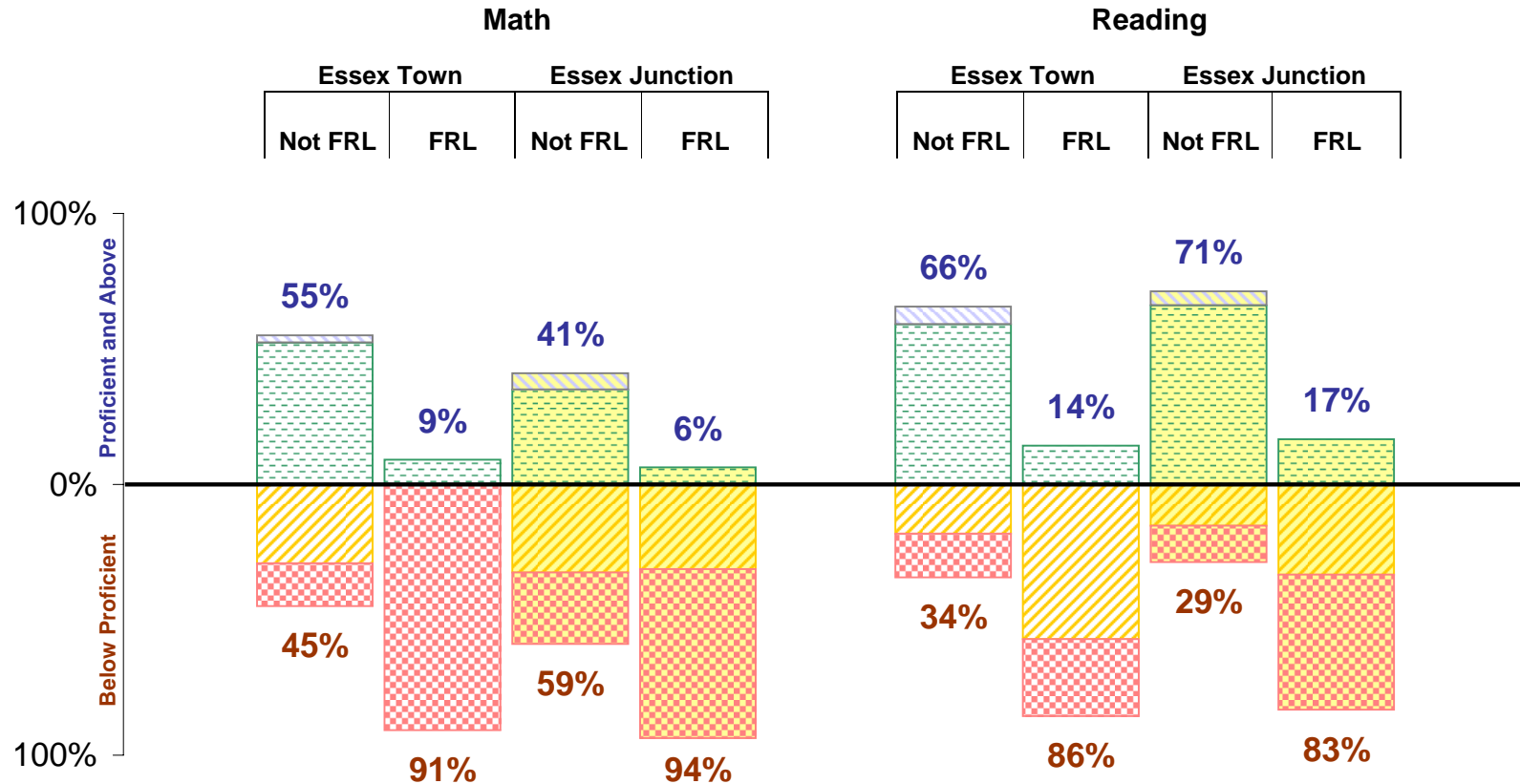
## Differences in Achievement Between Essex Town Students and Essex Junction Students



	Math		Reading	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
	Essex Town	Essex Junction	Essex Town	Essex Junction
Number of Students	162	99	162	99
Proficient with Distinction	2%	5%	27%	24%
Proficient	49%	30%	58%	54%
Partially Proficient	27%	32%	10%	16%
Substantially Below Proficient	21%	32%	4%	6%
Total Above Proficient	52%	35%	85%	78%
Total Below Proficient	48%	65%	15%	22%

# Grade 11 NECAP Results Essex High School

## Differences in Achievement Between Free/Reduced Lunch Students and Other Students in 2007



**Math**

	Essex Town		Essex Junction	
	Not FRL	FRL	Not FRL	FRL
Number of Students	151	11	83	16
Proficient with Distinction	3%	0%	6%	0%
Proficient	52%	9%	35%	6%
Partially Proficient	29%	0%	33%	31%
Substantially Below Proficient	16%	91%	27%	63%
<b>Total Above Proficient</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Total Below Proficient</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>94%</b>

**Reading**

	Essex Town		Essex Junction	
	Not FRL	FRL	Not FRL	FRL
Number of Students	151	11	83	16
Proficient with Distinction	29%	0%	28%	6%
Proficient	58%	55%	55%	44%
Partially Proficient	10%	18%	14%	25%
Substantially Below Proficient	3%	27%	2%	25%
<b>Total Above Proficient</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Total Below Proficient</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>50%</b>

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion of the commissioner is that this study makes a compelling argument for regrouping the supervisory union/district structure of which the Essex Town Supervisory District (ETSD) is a part. However, for the reasons set forth in his December 15, 2009 letter (see attached), the commissioner recommends that the State Board of Education vote to not take action on their statutory authority to regroup the Essex Town Supervisory District. The Essex Town Supervisory District Board may proceed with its process to hire a new superintendent.



**State of Vermont**  
**Vermont Department of Education**  
120 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501

December 15, 2009

Dear Board Members:

While I find the information compelling, and the rationale for regrouping the Essex Town Supervisory District into the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union impossible to ignore, I will not recommend that change to you at this time.

In this report, it is clear that there are potential savings to be found, and prospects for more efficient use of resources. Looking at the geography and make-up of the districts, it is clear that it is illogical to leave Essex Town as its own supervisory district. It is the only supervisory district with the K-8 configuration in the entire state. I do hope that the members of the Essex community take this report and explore the idea themselves.

I believe that this would be the right thing to do for the students and community of Essex Town, but the fact is that I need to concentrate on making these changes on the larger statewide level. Making these changes piecemeal, when a superintendency happens to become vacant, is not strategic. My hope is that the Legislature will take on the issue of school district consolidation as a way to bring greater efficiency and effectiveness to the system. If that does not occur, I will be scrutinizing each superintendency vacancy with the ultimate goal of reducing the number of school districts in Vermont.

Another important factor prevents me from recommending a change to this particular supervisory district at this particular time. This afternoon, the Board will hear from the Transformation Policy Commission on potential strategies to bring about a transformed education system to meet the changing needs of our students. One of their major recommendations is to reduce the number of districts statewide, in a strategic manner, to provide students with the best educational opportunities possible. This statewide initiative should and will be my focus when it comes to district reorganization. To tackle the problems here and there when they arise is haphazard and may be premature in light of future changes.

I do believe that we need to reduce the number of school districts and school boards in Vermont. We need to offer students more options, including school choice, within their districts. I want to see a major change to school governance statewide. I believe we need to make our decisions based on what is in the best interest of the students in the system, not the adults. This change to Essex Town would not expand options for students, nor would it provide the greater efficiencies that could be gained from consolidating school districts.

As commissioner, I need to be clear that I very much want to recommend that Essex Town Supervisory District join the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union. If this were an isolated situation, I would not hesitate to recommend that the Board do so. However, this is a pervasive issue statewide, and must be dealt with on a higher systems level.





If Vermont's elected officials do not attempt to address this issue and the potential efficiencies it will bring, I will move forward in doing what I can across the state to make these changes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Armando Vilaseca". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Armando Vilaseca, Commissioner  
Vermont Department of Education